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Publications Procurement Trip to Caucasus

Between July 22 and 30, Embassy publications procurement officer Leo Moser traveled with his wife as follows: Moscow-Sochi-Tbilisi-Yerevan-Tbilisi-Ordzhonikidze-Baku-Moscow. The primary purpose of the trip was the purchase of locally published materials not normally available in Moscow. (The stop enroute at Sochi was annual leave.)

The trip, on a rather tight schedule, was performed almost exactly as planned, although at several points the travelers were first told that onward reservations were not available as requested.

There was no interference with the publications procurement function of the trip except at Baku, where several books and pamphlets selected were "withdrawn from sale" on July 29 by the director of Bookstore No. 2, ulitsa Saratovtza Yefimova no. 46. The grounds for this withdrawal was that the publications were on order by collective farms in the area and were thus "already sold out". This was the first time in eleven months in the Soviet Union with visits to scores of bookstores that this had happened to the reporting officer. The materials in case were not particularly significant titles, most were political and atheistic brochures in the Azerbaijani language. The reporting officer asked to see the Director, who had been "in the shadows" during the whole operation and, speaking to the latter in his office, received great protestations of international cooperation. Later the publications procurement officer was shown through the store, including the back room where, under a massive portrait of Stalin, bundles of books were being prepared for shipment to local collective farms. The Director maintained that he was sorry, but, that the withdrawn publications were all thus spoken for. The action of bookstore employees, the fact that large stacks of several of the publications were on open display on tables in the store and the nervous behavior of the Director, left no doubt, however, that this explanation was contrived. Only when the reporting officer started making a list of the titles that he had been denied, did the Director relent and offer him the materials he had successfully listed. Thus, about a third of the materials were returned, including the only title that seemed of more than incidental interest, one

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of the national income of Azerbaijan in the Azerbaijani language (Sovet Azerbaj-chanyryn Milli Keliri by G. Dadashov, Baku, 1961). After this, procurement became extremely difficult in Baku. It was clear that the nearby bookstore that the Embassy officer next visited had been "forwarned", probably by a phone call between directors. All requested titles were "sold out" and for the first time in the Soviet Union the reporting officer was denied a request to step behind the counter and look at books on the shelves. Some clerks visibly trembled at his approach.

During the time the reporting officer was in the Director's office at Bookstore No. 2, his wife, across the street buying postage stamps at a kiosk, narrowly foiled an attempt by two men to steal her purse.

Other than the above-mentioned incidents in Baku, all official and unofficial contacts were cooperative and friendly.

THOMPSON

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